

Lowell was born in 1855, near the State House—the epicenter of “the Hub of the Solar System,” as Oliver Wendell Holmes famously called the city. More than most, Lowell helped Boston live up to that claim, with his relentless research into the heavens. The astronomical symbol for Pluto, a P and L mashed together, is a tribute to him. And by laying out instructions for where to look for the celestial object he called “Planet X,” Lowell was like the owner of a shoveled-out parking spot, leaving a battered lawn chair as a space-saver, to mark his territory forever. How Boston is that?

Lowell was an unlikely astronomical pioneer. He grew up privileged, one of a brood that included Harvard’s future president, A. Lawrence Lowell, and the poet Amy Lowell (whom he called “Big Fat Baby”). He could have coasted, the way so many wealthy Americans did in the smug years that followed the Civil War. But three deep passions seized him, and helped him to achieve escape velocity—enough to leave Boston’s gravity forever.

The first of these was Japan. In 1883, after a brief period managing family investments, he set sail for what he called “the morning land,” in search of spiritual enlightenment. Americans had begun to appreciate Japanese design at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, so fresh and direct in contrast to the grandiloquent statements of the Gilded Age. A small wavelet of Bostonians traveled there, or even established residence, including William Sturgis Bigelow (who gave 40,000 Japanese artifacts to the MFA), Isabella Stewart Gardner, Edward Sylvester Morse, and Ernest Fenollosa. Lowell happily joined this expatriate tide, which fit perfectly his desire to declare independence from the Hub.

He lived in Japan for 10 years, and wrote prolifically about Shintoism and other aspects of a culture that he found un-Bostonian in every way—except for its ancestor worship. At the same time, Boston helped him immensely, by distributing his esoteric musings through well-trusted outlets like *The Atlantic*. His writings inspired other Japanophiles, and they helped Lowell gain the confidence to explore other worlds. These he was beginning to glimpse, by climbing Japanese mountains, where it was understood that spiritual understanding came more quickly. The Buddhists revere what they call “celestial” enlightenment. Typically, Lowell found it in his own way, by searching the skies for unusual objects.

In 1893, he began to devote intense study to the planet Mars, the second of his three obsessions. Learning that Mars would be approaching close to Earth the next year, he dropped everything and began to prepare. He purchased land on an elevated plateau near Flagstaff, Ariz., brought two large telescopes, and for the next 23 years devoted his attention to the place he named Mars Hill. It became a kind of transcendental-astronomical paradise for him, and he delivered philosophical musings, like, “To stand a mile and a half nearer the stars is not to stand immune.” Lowell’s principal thesis—that Mars contained a network of canals, and was likely inhabited—was more imaginative than scientific.

But despite Lowell’s failure to find signs of extraterrestrial life, his years of close observation yielded much valuable data, and helped people see our planetary neighbor in new ways. The science fiction industry was not slow to follow his lead, and tales of Martian invaders have never failed to sell. He built an important establishment in Arizona, the Lowell Observatory. And once again, he fell in love with an exotic land—this time, the Southwest, where he wandered happily, collecting plant specimens by day, and stars by night.

Lowell’s third passion took him even further afield. Earlier in life, as a young man recently graduated from Harvard, he had tired of Boston’s predictability, and written, with the studied weariness of the young, that he was considering “migrating to another planet or ceasing to exist.”

In 1905, he began an obsessive search for a new planet, beyond Neptune, the legendary “Planet X.” He predicted where it might be found, and even photographed it in 1915, although he was not aware that he had. He died a year later, but it would have delighted this otherworldly thinker to know that his research lived on and provided a road map to the sky-gazers who followed in his wake.

In 1930, when Pluto was finally pinpointed, there was universal excitement. Walt Disney named Mickey Mouse’s dog after the discovery. The element plutonium was also named after Pluto. There were now nine planets—a number that felt right. It seemed as if Lowell had found final vindication, after all those years chasing Japanese ghosts and Martian canals.

But year by year, as scientists got to know Pluto better, they liked it less, finding it smaller than expected, icy, and dubious in other ways, including its orbit and its relationship with neighboring objects. In 2006, 101 years after Lowell began his search for it, Pluto suffered the ultimate indignity when it was downgraded to a “dwarf planet.” The fleeting fly-by this Tuesday may help restore luster to the object formerly known as Planet X. But more than likely, we will have to look elsewhere for Lowell’s vindication.

Fortunately, it’s not too hard to find. In June, scientists began to get excited again about the possibility of life on Mars, and research is coming into the Martian subsoil. A different monument to Lowell exists right here, in Cambridge’s Mount Auburn Cemetery. He is not buried there, that would be too predictable (his actual grave is at Mars Hill, in Arizona). But a piece of petrified rock, left by his instruction, gives his grave’s real location, and testifies to the enduring individuality of a Bostonian who wanted to be present, but not too present. Percival Lowell always encountered the world on his own terms.

CONGRATULATING NEW HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL FOR ITS BRONZE MEDAL AWARD

HON. BLAINE LUETKEMEYER

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating New Haven High School on its Bronze Medal Award as a top Missouri High School from U.S. News and World Report.

This school’s administration, teachers, and students should be commended for all of their hard work throughout the past year and for their commitment to education.

I ask you to join me in recognizing New Haven High School for a job well done.

TRIBUTE TO STANLEY AND WILMA EMBREE

HON. DAVID YOUNG

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Mr. YOUNG of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Stanley

and Wilma Embree on the very special occasion of their 70th wedding anniversary on June 17, 2015.

This couple was married in North Carolina in 1945 and farmed in Adams County until the 1980’s. Stanley and Wilma now live in Atlantic, Iowa in Cass County. Stanley and Wilma’s lifelong commitment to each other and to their children and family truly embodies Iowa’s values. I congratulate this devoted couple on their 70 years together and I wish them many more. I know my colleagues in the United States House of Representatives will join me in congratulating them on this momentous occasion.

DISTINGUISHED OFFICER EDWARD ALFRED THOMAS

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the Houston Police Headquarters will soon be renamed in honor of the retired Senior Police Officer Edward Alfred Thomas, a fitting tribute to his lifelong service to the city of Houston.

Police Officer Edward Alfred Thomas, also known as “Mr. Thomas” around the station, has provided 65 years of service as an officer to the Houston Police Department.

Officer Thomas served the Houston Police Department from January 12, 1948 to July 23, 2011. His accomplishments are numerous and include The 100 Club, Officer of the Year, the Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Chief of Police Commendation.

Officer Thomas served nearly 20 years prior to the Civil Rights Movement and was one of the first African-American police officers to integrate into the Houston Police Department.

Fellow officers declare that Officer Thomas has been an incredible example of perseverance, courage, and duty to the Houston Police Force.

Several organizations support the proposal to name the Police Headquarters in Officer Thomas’s honor such as the African American Police Officer League (AAPOL), Houston Police Officer’s Union (HPOU), the Houston Organization of Public Employees (HOPE), and Houston Police Organization of Spanish Speaking Officers (OSSO).

The City Council unanimously approved the proposal to name the Houston Police Headquarters in his honor on June 15, 2015.

And that’s just the way it is.

OUR UNCONSCIONABLE NATIONAL DEBT

HON. MIKE COFFMAN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, on January 20, 2009, the day President Obama took office, the national debt was \$10,626,877,048,913.08.

Today, it is \$18,151,921,010,337.51. We’ve added \$7,525,044,062,425.42 to our debt in 6 years. This is over \$7.5 trillion in debt our nation, our economy, and our children could